

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OES-03 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 HEW-02 AID-05 IO-10 EUR-12 CU-02 /091 W

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R 221800Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2353

AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

INFO AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 5343

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: TBIO, CS

SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING
(ICMRT)

REF: SAN JOSE 4930 (NOTAL)

1. DOCTOR VICTOR VILLAREJOS, DIRECTOR OF THE ICMRT IN

SAN JOSE, CALLED ON DCM AND ECON OFFICER DECEMBER 18 TO
REPORT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FLU VACCINATION CONTROVERSY
INVOLVING THE ICMRT AND REPORTED IN REFTEL. BRIEFLY,
THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH HAS DETERMINED THAT THE ICMRT
WAS NOT USING A DANGEROUS VACCINE FOR EXPERIMENTATION,
BUT THAT THE ICMRT HAD ERRED IN NOT OBTAINING THE
NECESSARY PERMITS TO CARRY OUT THE VACCINATION PROGRAM.
DR. VILLAREJOS INSISTS THAT THE ICMRT DID HAVE THE
PERMITS, BUT WILL NOT MAKE AN ISSUE OF THE MINISTRY'S
DECISION.

2. MORE DISTURBING TO DR. VILLAREJOS IS A NEW EXECUTIVE
DECREE THAT HAS RESULTED FROM THE CONTROVERSY AND WHICH
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CALLS FOR APPROVAL OF ANY FOREIGN MEDICAL RESEARCH OR

EXPERIMENTATION

PROGRAM INVOLVING HUMAN BEINGS BY A COMMITTEE OF MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS NAMED BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH. THE EXECUTIVE DECREE ALSO STIPULATES THAT INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS OPERATING IN COSTA RICA HAVE TO LEAVE THEIR EQUIPMENT IN COSTA RICA UPON TERMINATION AND HAVE TO PUBLISH THEIR PROFESSIONAL FINDINGS FIRST IN SPANISH. DR. VILLAREJO'S MAIN CONCERN IS THAT THE COMMITTEE WILL TAKE AN INORDINATE AMOUNT OF TIME TO APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE A PROJECT THUS OBSTRUCTING NECESSARY PLANNING AND SMOOTH OPERATIONS.

3. AS A RESULT OF DELAYS ALREADY EXPERIENCED BY THE ICMRT, DR. VILLAREJOS HAS DECIDED TO TRANSFER SOME OF THE CENTER'S ACTIVITIES AND FACILITIES TO HONDURAS. IN ADDITION, AN URGENT RUBELLA MEASLES STUDY WILL BE DONE IN NICARAGUA USING CONTRACTED FACILITIES. DR. VILLAREJOS HOPES THAT HE WILL BE ABLE TO CONTINUE THE CENTER'S BASIC HEPATITIS RESEARCH PROJECT IN COSTA RICA. IN THIS CASE, APPROVAL WHICH HAS BEEN REQUESTED IS NOT AS URGENT SINCE THE PROJECT IS ALREADY UNDERWAY (IT WOULD CONTINUE FOR ANOTHER 3 TO 5 YEARS). THE CENTER WILL REQUIRE APPROVAL BY MID-JANUARY, HOWEVER, IN ORDER TO MAKE FUTURE PLANS.

4. DR. VILLAREJOS ALSO STATED THAT ACCORDING TO SOURCES WHICH HE CONSIDERED VERY RELIABLE THE PEOPLE BEHIND THIS EFFORT TO HARASS ICMRT ARE BEING ENCOURAGED BY THE SOVIET EMBASSY. DR. VILLAREJOS BELIEVES THAT THE AIM OF THE NEW EXECUTIVE DECREE IS TO STRANGLE THE CENTER IN RED-TAPE AND EVENTUALLY FORCE IT OUT OF COSTA RICA ALLOWING THE RUSSIANS TO STEP IN AT A LATER DATE WITH OFFERS OF SCIENTIFIC COLLABORATION. FURTHERMORE, DR. VILLAREJOS SAYS THAT THE ICMRTS IN COLOMBIA AND BRAZIL ARE EXPERIENCING SIMILAR DIFFICULTIES, AGAIN ALSO INSPIRED BY THE SOVIET EMBASSIES, AND INTENDED TO FORCE THE CENTERS OUT OF THEIR HOST COUNTRIES. THUS, HE SEES THE HARD TIMES BEING EXPERIENCED BY THE ICMRTS IN THESE COUNTRIES AS EVIDENCE OF A COORDINATED SOVIET CONSPIRACY TO UNDERMINE U.S. SCIENTIFIC INFLUENCE IN LATIN AMERICA ACROSS THE BOARD AND TO OPEN THE WAY FOR INCREASED

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RUSSIAN PENETRATION.

5. COMMENT: WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE OF SOVIET INVOLVEMENT IN THIS EPISODE, BUT THE LEFTIST AND INDEED COMMUNIST LEANINGS OF PERSONS WHO BROUGHT THE INITIAL CHARGES AGAINST ICMRT SUGGEST THAT SUCH INVOLVEMENT IS POSSIBLE. THE SOVIET-COSTA RICAN CULTURAL AGREEMENT RATIFIED EARLIER THIS YEAR WOULD PROVIDE A CONVENIENT

UMBRELLA FOR INCREASED SOVIET SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITIES
IN COSTA RICA.WE WOULD APPRECIATE ANY COMMENTS FROM
EMBASSIES BOGOTA AND BRASILIA RELEVANT TO THIS REPORT.
TODMAN

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